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Cruel Irony

“For in much wisdom is much grief, and increase of knowledge is increase of sorrow”

–Ecclesiastes 1:18

In a world where information is distributed and received with utmost proficiency, many people still choose to remain in a state of ignorance. Considering the negative connotation that the word “ignorance” carries, this decision can be confounding to others. However, I have come to realize that it is impossible to engage in both the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of knowledge, because knowledge shatters even the most blissful illusions.

It is Saturday, August 1st. I rise from slumber at 7:30 in the morning, stumble over to my bathroom mirror, gaze deep into my eyes, and think, “Time for an easy run.” I place my iPod headphones in my ears, descend a flight of stairs, wolf down 2 bagels for breakfast, and then ascend to my room in order to select my workout attire. I gently pass my hand from hangar to hangar while browsing through my closet, until it comes to rest upon a generic, white Nike shirt. So simple in design and appearance, yet so silky and elegant in texture, this shirt is the epitome of minimalist clothing. I admire the shirt’s quality, silently deliberate over the effort required to produce it, and think, “If I had known before, I would have chosen differently.” More or less content with this selection, I proceed to ascertain which pairs of socks and shorts I will wear for the run. Postceding a few moments of indecision, I draw a pair of black Nike socks and black Nike shorts from a pile of expertly folded clothes (my mother is too kind). When I am finished dressing in my designated outfit, I descend the stairs again, tie my favorite pair of Nike running shoes, and proceed to stretch. My cousin saunters into the room with his Macbook Pro and his iPhone as I am stretching, sits down, and continues his browsing session. I observe how his face lights up while watching YouTube videos and think to myself, “He is clueless about those poor people.”

Have you ever wondered how the typical consumer is able to obtain a device as mystical as the iPod touch for a mere $200? Or how he or she can purchase that perfect pair of Nike shoes for under $60? If you are in the dark, you are not alone; the majority of consumers are uninformed of how far both Nike and Apple are willing to go to keep a competitive edge in their markets. Apple has exploited its Asian workforces to the point where Foxconn, the primary manufacturer of the iPhone, had to install netting to catch suicidal employees. Nike’s labor practices are equally ignominious, as it is notorious for its implementation of child labor in “sweatshops”. After learning about how these companies produce their goods, my perception of Nike clothing and Apple technology was decidedly and irrevocably altered, and I repine each and every purchase made from those companies.

Most people will tell you that ignorance is bliss, and continue on their merry way; it is so much deeper than that. Ignorance is not merely bliss. No, in the words of George Orwell, “… [I]gnorance is strength.” Ignorance is strength because it allows human beings to inadvertently commit or condone atrocious acts towards one another and not feel the slightest bit of remorse over such actions. Inversely, knowledge brings weakness and sorrow, because with knowledge comes understanding, and with understanding comes empathy.